

SUN BUT NO SON

Just picture it: basking on a golden-sandy beach drenched in gloriously hot sun; before you the clear shimmering blue-green waters of the Mediterranean. An idyllic holiday with little else to do but soak up the sun.

Italy – land of sea, land of sun.

Easy to forget, then, that, so to say, Italy actually has little of the Son.

Easy to think of Italy as land of history, a place to visit, good food and sport... and much else beside, yet a land engulfed in deep darkness.

Post-Christianised, post-modern, relativistic, consumeristic values (or lack of them) have a stranglehold on most Italians.

Don't forget that even the most optimistic figures suggest no more than 1% born-again Christians. Lots of sun, but no Son.

- Gianni is in his early twenties. Much exposure to the Son has been met with indifference and apathy. Now he worships fun and sun, but no Son.
- Marco is also in his early twenties. Growing dissatisfaction with Christianity resulted in interest with occultism. Now he is one of a growing number of Satanists. Transgressive practices, a search for a 'high' – no Son.
- Francesca is a practicing church-goer. Several times a week she attends mass. She is also happy to attend an Evangelical church where she enjoys the warm atmosphere and the singing. She's a 'sympathizer'. "Catholicism's ok," she says. Jesus, Mary, the saints, the Pope, sacramental salvation – religion, but no Son.

The challenge of Italy today is bringing the Son to this wonderful, yet dark land.

The Son who brings a radical change of mindset and life-style. Who brings light and does not co-habit with darkness.

Praise God for a growing missional vision – Christians who take the Son into the work-place, school & family environment.

- Salvo preferred to lose a good job rather than give in to dishonest practices.
- Rosa courageously publicly shared her faith in the Son at her final state-exams.
- Maria found the Son and her personal testimony was so radiant that more than a dozen family members were touched and themselves believed.

But the opportunities and needs remain great and almost overwhelming.

- 2.6 million foreigners live in Italy; many come from 'closed' lands. Who will bring them to the Son?
- Spirituality is increasingly popular as itching ears eagerly seek prophets and gurus. How will they hear?
- The universities remain woefully dark – no Son. Who will go there?

Pray that the Italian church might be strong and encouraged.

- The enemy's strategy of division, scandal and a little picture mentality is effective
- Mission is still generally thought of as being something to be done later, when the time is more appropriate (four months...)

Still today, Italy is a land for a holiday. Many have taken it off the 'mission-map'. Put it back! Now more than ever we have the opportunity, responsibility and challenge of bringing the Son to Italy. Come on a Gospel-holiday. Build up a local church with your encouraging presence and care. Make a weekend trip to visit a struggling missionary. 'Retire' here! So many possibilities.

May the Son shine in the land of the sun! ■

Jonathan Gilmore



Interested in knowing more about the challenge and opportunity of Italy? Jonathan and his family will be spending time in the UK from September 2007 and can be contacted via the UFM office or directly – jdgilmore@bigfoot.com